



THE IMPACT OF INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION ON TEENAGERS' MENTAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

As mental health awareness increases, it is important to understand the determinants of teenage mental health. This study emphasizes the importance of balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in teenagers' lives. By finding the equilibrium between internal and external motivational factors, teenagers will be able to find their activities rewarded by external influences while being intrinsically motivated by their internal passion. It was found that the combination of both types of motivation is imperative for maintaining psychological health and fostering personal growth among all teenagers.

KEYWORDS: Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Teenagers' Mental Health, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA), Operant Behavior Theory

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, understanding the dynamics of motivation and mental health is crucial for ensuring teenagers' consistent engagement in their daily learning routines. Due to the challenges throughout 2020, like COVID-19 and the shift to remote learning, the number of teenage Canadians who have reported excellent mental health has dropped by close to 15% since 2018 (Findlay & Arim, 2020), signaling a significant detriment to teenage wellbeing. To understand why such drastic changes have occurred, it is crucial to ask the question of whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation can positively influence the short and long-term mental health of adolescents. This is to help gauge the effectiveness of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and their distinct implications on a teenager's mental health to inform students, parents, school boards, and policymakers alike. Specifically, we will delve into the idea that intrinsic motivation, stemming from a genuine interest and personal satisfaction in learning, may be more beneficial in fostering long-term psychological well-being. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation, which often relies on external rewards or pressures, may offer short-term benefits but could fall short of sustaining overall long-term mental health.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on teenagers' mental health is crucial for fostering well-being and academic success. Research has consistently highlighted the complex interplay between these motivational types and their effects on adolescent psychology.

Ryan & Deci's seminal paper "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions" (2000) provides foundational insights into the characteristics and effects of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. They emphasize the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which suggests that intrinsic motivation arises from innate psychological needs for

autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Extrinsic motivation, while initially driven by external rewards or pressures, can transform into intrinsic motivation if aligned with personal values.

Harter's Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA) (2012) offers a valuable framework for assessing self-esteem across different domains, which can help understand the role of intrinsic motivation in enhancing self-worth and long-term engagement in activities. This profile allows adolescents to self-evaluate their involvement and enjoyment, providing insights into their intrinsic motivation levels.

Skinner's Operant Behavior Theory (1953) underscores the role of extrinsic motivation in shaping behavior through rewards and punishments. For teenagers, external motivators like grades and parental approval can initially drive behavior but may eventually contribute to internalizing these motivations if they align with personal goals and interests.

Liquin & Gopnik (2022) explored the exploratory behavior of children and adolescents, finding that intrinsic motivation plays a significant role in their learning processes. Their research highlights that teenagers, driven by curiosity and passion, engage more deeply in activities that interest them, supporting long-term psychological well-being.

Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar (2005) examined age differences in intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations in the classroom. They found that intrinsic motivation is linked to better academic outcomes and emotional well-being, while extrinsic motivation, though useful for short-term goals, may not sustain long-term engagement.

A study by Grolnick & Ryan (1987) on autonomy in children's learning demonstrated that supportive environments that foster

autonomy enhance intrinsic motivation, leading to better psychological health and academic performance. This aligns with SDT, showing that autonomy-supportive environments are crucial for nurturing intrinsic motivation.

Defining Types of Motivation

Before comparing the value and impact that motivation has on a teenager's mental health, we must define what makes an incentive internal or external. In the case of intrinsic motivation, one participates in a task for the innate enjoyment of the said task. These tasks are typically done for a sense of fulfillment or challenge outside of material or social rewards. An example of intrinsic motivation would be a child wanting to read about airplanes because they find it enjoyable. The child gains no physical award or social merit, yet the child gains inner happiness/satisfaction from the occurrence. On the other hand, there is extrinsic motivation, which perfectly contrasts with its intrinsic counterpart. One who participates in a task for material, social, or intellectual gains would be considered to be driven by extrinsic motivation. For example, a child who is forced to read a book on airplanes by their parents. In this case, the parents act as an external factor to pressure the child into learning about airplanes, so the child can satisfy the parents and reap knowledge.

Exploring Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation plays a pivotal role in the lives of teenagers and supports their natural curiosity. Unlike adults, who often pursue goals driven by external factors such as societal pressures or material gains, teenagers and younger children tend to be more intrinsically motivated. The intrinsic motivation of children arises from their genuine curiosity, passion, and interest in various activities (Liquin & Gopnik, 2022). Teenagers often do not have the weight of societal expectations or the need for immediate material rewards; therefore, they have more freedom to engage in tasks that genuinely captivate their imagination and sense of purpose. In this environment, children can discover their true passions, develop essential life skills, and build a strong foundation for their future, all driven by curiosity and inquisitiveness rather than societal pressures, which can lead to more motivated individuals in society.

However, this raises another important question: what effect does intrinsic motivation have on teenagers, and how do we gauge its effects? The Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (SPPA), created by Susan Harter, is a usable method to assess an adolescent's self-esteem. The framework allows for self-evaluation of teenagers' involvement and enjoyment of 8 different domains: scholastic competence, social competence, athletic competence, physical appearance, job competence, romantic appeal, behavioral conduct, and close friendships (Harter, 2012). After being provided with questions from each domain, teenagers can respond to statements on the scale by indicating the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement. The responses are then scored and analyzed to provide a comprehensive profile of their self-perception in each domain. In this way, they are able to utilize their self-perceived answers as an asset to make more informed decisions, set realistic goals, and work towards personal growth and development. Teens are

able to use this newfound knowledge to expand their passion for their hobbies and innate interests, which leaves a positive impact on their mental state.

Exploring Extrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation seems to contribute positively to teenager's mental health; however, extrinsic motivation is equally significant for teenagers, especially through the complexities of education and social development. External factors, such as rewards, punishments, or societal expectations, are typically very common motivators for adolescents. A framework that outlines this is B.F. Skinner's Operant Behavior Theory. The theory highlights how behavior can be shaped by consequences. In the case of teenagers, they are more likely to complete tasks when they perceive external rewards or avoid penalties such as detentions for being late or awards for getting good grades (Skinner, 1953). Teenagers may initially complete these tasks to reap rewards or avoid punishments, but subsequent actions completed due to the same type of extrinsic motivation may nurture intrinsic motivation for the task. For example, if a child is told to complete their homework by their parents, they won't have much extrinsic motivation in the beginning due to conflicting opinions or other reasons. However, as the extrinsic motivation from the parents is reinforced consistently, the child develops a sense of normalcy for the activity. This also allows the child to settle into societal norms that may arise in the future, or are currently affecting them. Consequently, while extrinsic motivation can initially prompt teenagers to complete tasks, there is also a large influence on their long-term extrinsic motivation, leading to personal development within society.

Nevertheless, the impact of extrinsic motivation on teenagers is not uniform. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) contends that there is a spectrum of motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT reveals that while external rewards may initially prompt action, teenagers can experience a shift towards more intrinsic motivation if they perceive these tasks as personally meaningful or aligned with their intrinsic values. For instance, a student who initially studies for the promise of good grades may discover a genuine interest in the subject matter and eventually find joy in the activity with no external requirement. The increased autonomy and competence foster a sense of belonging with activity, especially for impressionable teenagers; this can lead to a transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation as they have more control and get better at the activity. Overall, this evolution from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation showcases the relationship between them and the potential for teenagers to cultivate their innate curiosity and passions through external factors.

Significance Towards Mental Health

Examining the differences between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation leads to the realization that both have a notable role in the maintenance and development of teenagers' mental health. Intrinsic motivation seems to be a motivator for genuine curiosity and opens avenues for teenagers to explore new ideas. One of the distinct benefits of intrinsic motivation comes from the allowance of creative pursuits. In contrast to extrinsic motivation, teenagers who are intrinsically motivated

are not coerced or pushed into pre-existing ideas of success. Going back to the previous example, parents encouraging their children to complete a certain objective could redirect teenagers' motivation from personal interests and passions to more restrictive and unimaginative paths. However, intrinsic motivation allows teenagers to invent and build on new ideas through their vastly different perspectives, in comparison to adults, to shape future societal advancements but, more importantly, to enhance confidence and encourage promising teenagers.

Frameworks like SPPA also help to reinforce the passions of teenagers. When teenagers self-evaluate themselves, they positively bolster their confidence to strengthen their personal goals while providing a comprehensive understanding of their lives. This type of positive reinforcement by SPPA and the freedom to explore personal interests help to positively impact the mental state of teenagers by allowing for their opinions or ideas to be heard and creating opportunities for teenagers to self-reflect to improve themselves.

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation involves a very 'give and take' relationship. Extrinsic motivation can be beneficial in providing incentives for teenagers to explore new experiences; however, the repetitive nature of being driven by external motivation can be very tiring and may even impede teenagers from putting in effort for certain activities. An example of this is when teachers motivate their students to work diligently and work on more assignments or homework to achieve better grades. At first glance, the incentive of receiving better grades and maybe even mentor appreciation, whether that be through parents or teachers, is very attractive for teenagers; however, excessive use of Skinner's Theory could lead to teens losing appreciation for the incentive over time or teens developing distaste for the activity being incentivized due to them not enjoying it. The main issue found from prolonged motivation from external sources is that it may start to have detrimental effects on teenagers' mental health as they do not participate in the activity for the satisfaction of completion, but only for the incentive. This is to say that if the task were to be replaced with any other task of equal enjoyment for the teenager, they would complete it for the sake of the reward. Although it is possible for some to develop a positive intrinsic interest in the activity, most teens will continue to require an incentive for every action they take, which reduces entertainment or enjoyment from their activities and prioritizes work or fulfilling external duties, which can lead to unhappiness.

Rewards and avoiding punishments can both be treated as good methods to motivate teenagers to work on activities. Extrinsic motivation can really only provide short-term incentives to achieve certain goals, like scoring high on a test. However, intrinsic motivation can help maintain a long-term interest in an activity, all the while making it an enjoyable experience for teenagers. Intrinsically motivated individuals may or may not be able to score a high mark on the test, but they will have prolonged interest in the subject and excel in practice much beyond the test.

An important sub-theory of SDT, Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), is also very helpful to show the relationship between both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. This theory plays a pivotal role in recognizing and understanding which external motivators are healthy or unhealthy. CET states that controlling external motivators, like being forced to do homework, negatively impacts the intrinsic motivation of the person being forced, while informative external motivators, like a teacher suggesting to do homework, positively impact the intrinsic motivation of the same person. Informative and positive extrinsic motivation can clearly foster a sense of autonomy and curiosity, which is similar to the effects of intrinsic motivation in comparison to the forceful nature of negative extrinsic motivation. Overall, the joy and opportunities presented by informative extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation together can positively support teenager's mental health by allowing them to explore their interests and receive positive encouragement for objectives outside of their usual hobbies.

Conclusion

The culmination of teenagers' mental health is finding the balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. One could argue that intrinsic motivation holds a significant advantage when it comes to nurturing the growth and well-being of teenagers. However, through frameworks like SPPA and SDT, young teenagers are able to understand how external factors may align with their personal values and long-term aspirations, which internally motivates them to strive for success. In the end, the integration of both forms of motivation in their daily lives will empower teens to explore their passions while attending to their social needs, ultimately contributing to well-maintained mental health and personal growth.

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